



Q&A with Nicholas Haan, Global Manager of the IPC

1. What is the IPC?

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is essentially two things: (1) a standardized scale of food insecurity; and (2) a process for building technical consensus. The IPC standardized scale divides up food insecurity into five Phases: Generally Food Insecure, Moderately Food Insecure, Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis, Humanitarian Emergency, and Famine. Each of these Phases has important and distinct implications for where and how best to intervene. The Phases are determined by analyzing a wide range of outcomes based on international standards including food consumption levels, livelihoods, malnutrition, and mortality. These are triangulated with contributing factors such as market prices, income levels, crop and livestock production, rainfall, and many others. The IPC classification is based on a convergence of all of this evidence. The IPC is kind of like a thermometer that tells you the 'temperature' of how bad a food security situation is. But its more than just the temperature – just like water can change states from solid ice to liquid to gas as the temperature rises, the IPC indicates the changing phases of a food insecure situation.

2. How does the IPC help decision-making in a crisis?

The whole purpose of the IPC is decision support. It does this by simplifying quite complex food security situations into actionable knowledge. It is the job of the IPC analysts to sift through the myriad of indicators, methodologies, statistics, etc. so that senior planners and decision-makers can have the conclusions presented to them in a concise, accessible, and relevant manner. In short, the IPC provides the critical link between complex analysis and decision-making. Moreover, the consensus building approach of the IPC helps decision-making because key stakeholders from different institutions do not have to struggle with competing conclusions – rather, they can be comfortable knowing the IPC analysis is evidence based and represents the views of their technical staff.

The second aspect of the IPC, building technical consensus, is a process that brings together the key actors from national governments, NGOs, UN and technical agencies to share and analyse and debate the evidence on the indicators and methodologies noted previously. In this way, those key stakeholders eventually arrive at a consensual agreement on the Phase Classification. This is incredibly important because food insecurity by definition is complex and requires the various stakeholders to work together to be effective. Otherwise the various 'voices' can lead to cacophony – time, money, and resources are easily wasted just when things are critical. The IPC helps build consensus from the very start – having common agreement on where, who, and how severe the situation is.

3. At what point is this crisis in the Horn of Africa considered a famine?

From the IPC perspective, a crisis is considered a famine when one or a combination of the following outcomes are evident in a given area: at least 20 percent of the total population in

a given area are on the brink of starvation due to lack of food, livelihoods are completely collapsed and households have exhausted their ability to cope, acute malnutrition rates are greater than 30 percent of the population, and/or mortality rates exceed two people per 10 000 per day.

From the IPC perspective, 'famine' is not a rhetorical, emotive term. Rather it is a scientific classification based on standards, evidence, and technical consensus. It is up to the analysts working in the national governments, NGOs, UN, and technical agencies such as FEWSNET to make such a declaration using the IPC process.